

Spotted



US R&B singer Ne-Yo (left) chilling on a yacht in Dubai Marina. Brit pop singer Natasha

Bedingfield enjoying a Lebanese meal in The Dubai Mall before splashing out on some sparkly stilettos. **American musician and singer Skylar Grey taking photos of the buildings on Sheikh Zayed Road.**

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Hot seat

The Kooks' Hugh Harris

The 24-year-old English guitarist shares a few anecdotes with *Rob Garratt* ahead of the indie quirksters' performance at Chill Out Festival this week



We went back to the drawing board. It was tough.

Were you ever close to splitting?

Absolutely. It was belief that pulled us from the brink. You think, actually I do love playing in this band. You need belief in what you're doing. Then you can move forward and get on with it.

Is it a struggle to balance your pop roots with more grand ideas?

I don't think that far ahead. We've always been a pop band: that's who we are and the music we want to play. We can't shake it. But we like to mix in classical influences. We love to move forward.

Your first album, *Inside In/Inside Out*, was such a huge hit. Do you feel pressure to live up to it?

Much as we liked to deny it, there was a lot of pressure. We said the only pressure was to do well as creative artists, without realising we were putting pressure on ourselves. We've learned a bit, we've grown up, and it's more about personal satisfaction in writing pop songs and playing them.

A lot of people have criticised you for that – deliberately writing songs for the radio.

I don't see that as criticism. I struggle to get offended. The worst thing is that people take that seriously – radio is for playing music, that's what it's for. If you worry about that too much, it's silly. A lot of underground music is fantastic, and a lot of it is drivel. Equally, a lot of commercial music is fantastic; a lot is drivel.

The Kooks headline the Chill Out Festival at Dubai Media City Amphitheatre on Saturday April 21.

www.timeouttickets.com

What are you up to today?

It's a sunny day in London and I'm sitting drinking some hops. How is it in Dubai?

It's lovely – you're coming over at a really good time of year.

Great. As a band we're really excited to see what the audience there wants. My dad lives in Dubai – he moved over a couple of months ago – and he's coming to the gig, so hopefully we'll be able to embarrass him.

What did you make of the city when you last visited?

It's pretty special. It's one of the hardest, most trying places to be if you're used to 'established' cities. It has also encountered a lot of problems and is still finding its feet, but it feels so fresh and the spirit is amazing.

Looking forward to playing tracks from the new album live and it still feels exciting. We haven't sounded this good for a long time.

We've been trying out the new album live and it still feels exciting. We haven't sounded this good for a long time.

'We were close to splitting – it was belief that pulled us from the brink'

A lot of people have been wondering where you've been. What went wrong in the intervening years?

Like every band, we went through a bit of turmoil. We went to make a record and ended up scrapping it all.

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